

Emergency Response News



June 2003

IDEM responds to 7,000-gallon diesel fuel spill following a train derailment in Lake County

The Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) assisted local response agencies during a cleanup of an approximately 7,000-gallon diesel fuel spill after a train wreck in St. John, Lake County.

On June 11, an IDEM On Scene Coordinator received a call from the Lake County Fire Chiefs Association asking for assistance to clean up a diesel fuel spill resulting from a train derailment beside a lumberyard.

The train had been traveling along a raised bed when the lead engine collided with an obstacle laying across the tracks. The lead locomotive reeled off the tracks, broke the coupling, toppled on its side and crashed into a large pile of stacked lumber. A chain reaction occurred involving the other railcars. The second locomotive skipped off the tracks, listing on the rail. Diesel fuel spilled from the damaged locomotives onto the twisted and shattered railroad ties, down the ballast into a ditch, which fed a nearby wetland. A railcar carrying a cargo of appliances tumbled from the tracks and smashed into the lead locomotive. The caboose slowed and stopped on the tracks.

Firefighters from the St. John Volunteer Fire Department had to extricate railroad personnel from the lead engine.

IDEM's On Scene Coordinator met with the St. John Volunteer Fire Department, Lake County Fire Chiefs Association, Lake County Local Emergency Planning Commission and railroad company personnel at the incident command center to devise a cleanup plan.

The railroad company hired a contractor to handle the cleanup under IDEM's oversight. The cleanup included using a sidewinder to hoist the locomotives and railcar back onto an undamaged area of the track and move them along with the caboose to a maintenance facility. The contractor used a vacuum truck to collect approximately 7,000 gallons of diesel fuel on the ground and in a natural sump, which was taken to a permitted facility for disposal.

IDEM continued to monitor the cleanup to protect human health and the environment.



Site Snapshot

IDEM action:

Oversaw the cleanup of 7,000-gallons of spilled diesel fuel

Location:

Railroad tracks alongside a lumberyard and near a ditch that emptied into a wetland in St. John, Lake County

Primary substance of concern:

Diesel fuel

Environmental threats:

Soil and surface water contamination

For further information about IDEM's emergency response action at this site, contact staff at the following phone numbers or toll-free at (800) 451-6027:

Ralph McCullers, On Scene Coordinator
Northwest Regional Office
(219) 881-6714

Robert Simmons, Deputy Director
Northwest Regional Office
(219) 881-6712

Max Michael, Section Chief
Emergency Response Section
(317) 308-3049